

Maternal Instincts by vanillalime

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Summary:

Steve must protect the boys after Dustin finds trouble during an overnight camping trip.

Maternal Instincts

Author's Note:

Written for the 2018 Spook Me Multi-Fandom Halloween Ficathon. Creature Prompt: Mutant. The artwork prompt used for the story is included within the text.

WARNING: Contains spoilers for the original "Friday the 13th" (1980) movie.

Steve sat cross-legged on the floor of the tent, holding the flashlight under his chin to give his face an eerie, ethereal glow.

"So, just when Alice thinks she's found someone to help her, someone who will rescue her," he whispered to the four boys in front of him, "Mrs. Voorhees reveals that *she's* the one who murdered all the camp counselors."

Mike held his hand up. "Wait a minute, wait a minute. You're saying that Jason's *mother* is the original *Friday the 13th* killer?"

Steve turned to look directly at him. "Yes. Yes, I am," he answered in a deep, sinister voice. "As it turns out, Mrs. Voorhees is a vicious homicidal maniac, hell-bent on avenging her son's death."

Lucas whistled. "Whoa, I didn't know that."

"There's this big fight between Alice and Mrs. Voorhees," Steve continued breathlessly. "It goes on and on, until eventually Alice knocks Mrs. Voorhees out cold. She races down to the lake. She thinks everything's going to be okay, that she's escaped... until Mrs. Voorhees shows back up waving a machete around."

Steve raised an eyebrow suggestively. "Sort of like that axe we used earlier to chop up wood for our campfire." He slowly pointed toward the door of the tent and added, "You know, the one that we left right out there, just in front of the tent."

The boys all glanced nervously toward the closed flap, and Steve

swallowed his grin. "Anyway," he resumed, "Alice somehow steals the machete away from Mrs. Voorhees. She takes a big swing, and..." Steve suddenly swiped the flashlight under his chin. "She decapitates Mrs. Voorhees. Cuts her head completely off."

"Wow," gasped Dustin. "They actually showed that?"

Steve nodded. "You bet. You could, like, see the spinal cord and everything."

"Oh my god," whispered Will.

"So, *now* it's finally over. The killer's dead. Alice climbs into a boat and paddles out to the middle of the lake."

"Why in the *hell* does she do *that*?" Dustin asked incredulously.

Steve shrugged. "I guess she wanted to get as far away as she could from all those gruesome dead bodies."

"I would, too," Lucas said with a shudder.

"Alice falls asleep in the boat, and in the morning she wakes up to see the sheriff signaling her from the shore. Thank god, help is really here at last. She raises her arm to wave back."

Steve likewise waved his hand into the shadows of the tent. Then he took a deep breath and cried out, "That's when Jason's decomposed body **RISES** out of the water!" Steve threw his arms up in the air. "He grabs Alice and pulls her over the edge of the boat, dragging her with him down into the cold water of the deep, dark lake."

Steve suddenly brought his arms back down as the shocked faces of four boys stared back at him.

"So, after all that, Alice still dies?" Mike asked in stunned disbelief.

"Well, that's what you think," Steve declared, "until the next scene when she wakes up in the hospital, screaming her head off. She asks everyone in the room what happened to the boy in the lake, but no one knows what she's talking about."

"I can relate to some of that," mumbled Will.

"Did Jason get away?" Steve rhapsodized mysteriously. "Or was he only a figment of Alice's imagination? We just don't know."

"Based on the number of sequels, I'm guessing he got away," Dustin theorized.

"Well, we'll have to save the details of Part 2 for some other night," Steve told them, "because now it's time for bed." With a sly laugh, he added, "Sweet dreams, kids."

Steve rolled over and slid into his sleeping bag. After situating himself, he lay there in silence, listening to the rustling sounds of the boys climbing their way into their own bags. He patiently ignored their tedious chattering, waiting until they had safely readied themselves for sleep before switching his flashlight off.

Steve clasped his hands behind his head and smiled to himself. He still couldn't quite believe that he'd been talked into doing this gig. It's not like he needed the money—in fact, he felt bad about taking it. But Jonathan was sick with the flu, and Mrs. Byers had insisted there was no way Will was going on any overnight campout unsupervised, no matter how long the boys had been planning it. That's when Dustin had approached him, asking him to come to their rescue with those big sad eyes of his, and... well, sometimes it just felt good to be wanted. Even if it was by a group of 13-year-old boys.

A few minutes later, he turned his head to glance at Will, slightly concerned that his bedtime boogeyman story may have been too unsettling for him, and was pleasantly surprised to see him already dozing off. Then he heard the heavy breathing of deep sleep coming from Lucas, and the lack of movement out of Mike indicated he wasn't far behind. Which left Dustin, whose nearby twitching and grunting broadcast that he wasn't going down anytime soon.

"Damn," Dustin whispered.

Steve ignored him. Another minute passed.

"*Shit*," Dustin whispered again, slightly louder this time.

Steve sighed. "*What?*" he hissed.

"I shouldn't have drunk all that water."

Oh, great. "Well, that's a problem easily taken care of," Steve said dismissively. "There's plenty of trees on the other side of the clearing."

"I know."

Dustin stayed put. Steve waited, anticipating with dread what was coming next. And then it came.

"You drank a lot, too," Dustin noted. "Don't you have to go?"

"No," Steve quickly replied.

"Oh."

Jesus. Steve rubbed his forehead with his fingertips. This was his own fault. He should've known better. He rolled onto his side and spoke into the darkness. "It was just a stupid movie, Dustin. A *bad*, stupid movie. There's nothing to be afraid of."

"Yeah, because Hawkins is the safest place in the world."

"It is, 95 percent of the time. You've just been caught up in the 5 percent when it wasn't."

"Right."

"Listen, there's no Mrs. Voorhees out there," Steve said firmly. "There's no Jason. Trust me. Now, go pee."

Dustin sighed and made his way out of his sleeping bag. He put on his shoes and carefully crawled over his friends and across the floor of the tent. He slowly unzipped the flap, then paused to look back in Steve's direction. "If I'm not back in a couple of minutes, send out a search party," he solemnly told him.

Working hard to keep his voice even, Steve replied, "I got you. Don't worry."

Then Dustin disappeared through the hole.

Steve lay there in the comfort of his warm bag and waited. One minute went by, then two. Then three.

He listened hard to the night sounds... wind rustling through the trees, crickets chirping, owls hooting back and forth, the slow breathing of the other three people in the tent. But no sounds from Dustin.

Five minutes passed. Then six.

Steve checked his watch. Surely, he would be back any second.

Seven minutes. Eight.

Steve gripped his flashlight. Yes, Dustin would be back any second, and then Steve was going to strangle him.

At the ten-minute mark, Steve got out of his bag, cursing to himself. He turned on his flashlight, slipped on his shoes, and made his way through the tent.

Once outside, he stood up straight and slowly swung the flashlight in a wide arc, searching through the trees along the edge of their campsite for any sign of Dustin.

There wasn't any.

As Steve stepped forward, he took note of their axe, the blade of which they'd left buried in a tree stump outside their tent. He paused, shifted his flashlight to his other hand, and removed the axe from its resting place.

In Hawkins, you just never knew when a good weapon might come in handy.

He began to walk the perimeter of the clearing. "Dustin?" he said softly into the night air. "Dustin!"

No response.

Why was he whispering? The other kids were sound asleep. And it wasn't like he needed to worry about disturbing anyone else out here. Right?

Steve continued searching, trying to ignore the feeling of panic bubbling inside his chest. Using a voice louder than before, he repeatedly called out "Dustin!", stopping occasionally in hope of hearing another voice answering back.

There was none.

Within minutes, Steve had exhausted the area surrounding their campsite. Taking a deep breath, he then entered the woods, his axe at the ready.

Pushing aside branches and dancing around bushes, he anxiously shouted "Dustin!" Waving his flashlight haphazardly, he aimlessly walked further and faster, trying to cover as much ground as he could. He called out again and again, his barely-contained panic ready to erupt at any moment.

Until, finally, he got a reply.

"Steve?"

Steve stopped in his tracks. The voice had been faint, but he'd heard it.

"Dustin?" he answered.

"Yeah! C'mere!"

Steve leaned forward and put his hands on his knees, overwhelmed by a sense of relief. That feeling, however, changed quickly to annoyance as he realized that what he'd heard wasn't the voice of someone who was frightened or in danger. Dustin sounded *excited*.

"Where are you?" Steve yelled. *Let me find you so I can kill you.*

"Over here! Come look at this!"

Steve trudged toward the sound of Dustin's voice, traveling ever

deeper into the woods. Before long, he stumbled upon his missing charge, crouched down at the base of a tree, staring at a nearby bush with the world's goofiest grin on his face.

Before Steve had a chance to inflict bodily harm, Dustin motioned for him to be quiet. Then he waved for Steve to slowly come closer, whispering, "Careful, we don't want to spook it."

That's when Steve saw... it. And it was incredible.

Sitting under the bush was a creature unlike anything he'd ever seen before. The size of a large bird, its body was decidedly insect-like, with large, delicate iridescent wings. Those wings shimmered in the afterglow of a warm, yellow light emanating from smaller, bow-shaped wings near the top of its head. It reminded Steve of an extremely large dragonfly, one that had been bred, perhaps, with a magical fairy.

Except, of course, there was no such thing as fairies.

But, then again, this was Hawkins, so maybe there was.

"I saw it hanging around our campsite," Dustin explained quietly. "Then I followed it. Isn't it wonderful?"

"Yeah, it is," Steve had to agree.

Dustin held out the palm of his hand and moved it slowly toward the creature's body. "This is the closest I've gotten to it," he murmured. "I just want to see if it'll let me touch it."

Steve was about to say, "Don't." He was about to tell to Dustin that they should just head back to their tent. He was about to remind him of what happened the last time he got too friendly with a creature of unknown origins. But he wasn't fast enough, and what happened next was the price Dustin paid...

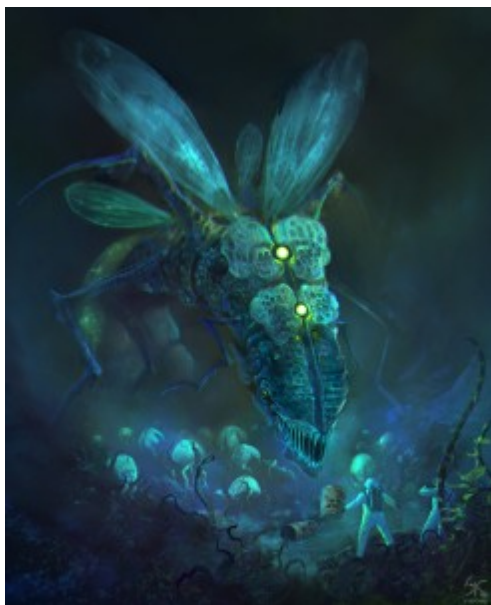
As his fingertips grazed the side of the creature's body, it suddenly opened its mouth, revealing a full set of razor-sharp teeth. With a loud shriek, it suddenly turned its head and sank those teeth into Dustin's outstretched arm, and Steve watched in horror as Dustin's blood sprayed upward into the soft light radiating from the creature's

head.

Dustin cried out in pain, and the creature released him. Then it made eye contact with Steve. It crouched down and tensed, preparing to attack. Steve reacted reflexively by raising his axe into the air.

That's when a deafening roar from high above them interrupted their confrontation.

Steve looked up, and his mouth dropped open. For there stood a giant-sized version of the creature Dustin had just tried to befriend... a bug-like fairy that was thirty feet tall, baring spear-like teeth half the size of a grown man, with a mouth opened wide enough to swallow Steve whole.



"Oh, fuck," Steve moaned in terror.

"Oh, *fuck*," echoed Dustin, and Steve irrationally had the presence of mind to regret swearing in front of him.

A light from the giant mutant's head cast an eerie glow over their surroundings. Lying in the shadows underneath its belly were dozens of egg-shaped pods that were roughly the same size as Dustin's now-

forgotten pet. The creature lowered its head and leaned forward, hovering over the pods, and Steve quickly realized that the thing in front of them was a mother fixated on protecting her young.

Steve began to slowly walk backwards, clutching his axe tight. Meanwhile, Dustin lay motionless on the ground.

"Dustin? Get up," Steve commanded in a low voice. "Come towards me."

Clutching his bloody arm, Dustin got to his feet and began staggering in Steve's direction. The mutant snarled at them but did not move.

After several steps, Steve reached a thick cluster of trees that offered temporary protection. Dustin was just a few feet away, his face white but determined.

"Hurry!" Steve whispered.

Dustin quickened his pace. Unfortunately, he had neglected to tie his shoelaces earlier, and that mistake was his literal downfall. He tripped and flew face forward. He hit the ground with a *thud*, landing on his injured arm. The sudden impact elicited an involuntary howl of pain and surprise and fear from Dustin's mouth.

And that unexpected sound was all that was necessary to trigger the creature's ultimate defense mechanism: attack. With another freakish roar, it moved directly at them.

Dropping the axe from his hand, Steve stepped away from the trees just long enough to grab Dustin by his good arm and pull him up. He quickly swung Dustin's arm around his neck and took off into the woods, half-carrying Dustin alongside him.

But the mutant creature followed. It moved slowly but steadily, its long legs covering more ground with one stride than Steve could cover in a dozen.

So Steve ran like their lives depended on it, which it most likely did. He weaved in and out of trees, the branches whipping his face, the scratches drawing blood, all the while dragging Dustin's limp form.

Run. Run.

He leapt over fallen limbs, slipped on damp leaves, tripped on rocks and tree stumps. But still he pumped his legs, moving as fast as he could, back toward their campsite, back to the only feasible means of escape.

Yet the creature kept pace behind them.

Run. Run.

As their campsite came into distant view, Steve thought of the boys still inside the tent, sound asleep. Every second was a precious commodity, the difference between life and certain mutilation. So he summoned all his inner strength and wheezed, "Car! Car!"

With growing alarm, Steve realized they'd never hear such weak vocalization. His lungs on fire, he tried again. "Car!"

He knew it wasn't enough.

Then, utilizing a sixth sense, he felt Dustin rally beside him. Dustin tightened his grip on Steve's shoulders, and an inexplicable mind-meld ensued. Blindly taking a deep breath together, they shouted, "Car!"

The word reverberated off the trees thanks to the power of their combined voices.

Run. Run.

Drawing strength from one another, they repeatedly called their alert. "Carrrrrr! Carrrrrr!"

They were almost to the clearing, but the creature was almost to them. Through the shadows, Steve saw the outline of Mrs. Wheeler's 1979 Oldsmobile Cutlass station wagon, the sluggish car they'd borrowed for the trip. He thought he could make out a figure standing next to it.

Run. Run.

Finally, they burst through. There stood Mike, loitering near the car, and Steve saw two more bodies slowly emerging from the tent. As a roar followed from close behind, the expression on Mike's face changed from one of bleary confusion to that of fear as he quickly processed the situation.

Steve used the last of his adrenaline to shout, "Get! In!"

Mike opened the driver's door for him, and Steve flew inside, pushing Dustin ahead of him into the passenger seat.

Keys. Keys. Above the visor. Grab them. Put them in the ignition. Turn. Go. Go.

A yellow glow illuminated the clearing as bodies filed into the back seat. Steve turned and counted heads. *One. Two. Two? Where was three-dammit-who-was-missing?!*

Then Will pushed himself up from the floor of the car *thank-you-god*, and Steve turned back around and gunned it, as much as a station wagon could be gunned.

They hurtled down the dirt lane that connected the campsite to the main road, the car bouncing over potholes, loose stones spraying high behind its wheels. The yellow glow behind them began to fade into the darkness.

Steve tried to bring his breathing back under control. With a gasp, he said, "We'll be fine."

The four boys said nothing. Lucas leaned over the backseat to hand Dustin a sweatshirt and helped him wrap it around his bloodied arm.

As the echo of a roar traveled through the night air, Steve blurted, "Just gotta get to the highway."

Minutes worth of driving flashed by in seconds, and then they were there. Steve turned sharply to the right. The feeling of smooth pavement under the wheels of the car was a promising change, fostering a sense of safety and security.

"I'm heading to Hopper's," Steve told them reassuringly. "He'll take

care of things. Don't worry, we're all right now. Everything's gonna be okay."

As he sped up, he could feel the weight of four pairs of eyes on him, staring at him questioningly. Finally, Dustin spoke.

"Are you sure? What if it's like *Friday the 13th*? What if we only *think* it's okay, and then the monster suddenly shows back up at the very end to kill us?"

Steve instinctively glanced in the rearview mirror. After a beat, he answered, "Don't be ridiculous," in an unusually high-pitched voice. "Like I said before, that was just a stupid movie."

Tightening his grip on the steering wheel, Steve then tried to convince himself that the light growing brighter behind them was just another car on the road.